

Information on Guerrilla's Death Withheld by U.S. for 14 Months

6/6/95
By R. Jeffrey Smith
Washington Post Staff Writer

A newly disclosed U.S. document shows that the federal government waited 14 months to inform American lawyer Jennifer Harbury that it had received intelligence information indicating that her husband, a Guatemalan guerrilla fighter, had been captured and killed by military forces.

The Defense Intelligence Agency was told by an informant in September 1993 of the capture and killing of Efraim Bamaca Velasquez, according to a declassified DIA document obtained yesterday by Harbury.

Harbury, who is in Guatemala trying to find her husband's body, and her attorney both criticized the government yesterday for withholding the tip until November 1994, after she began a highly publicized hunger strike across from the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala to protest the lack of information in the case.

At that time, U.S. officials first told Harbury about unspecified information that her husband had been captured and probably slain, a claim that contradicted public Guatemalan government assertions that Bamaca had died in a gun battle with military forces.

Several U.S. officials sought to explain the delay by emphasizing the uncertain reliability of the informant's tip. They noted that the DIA document in question stated that "this is an information report. Not finally evaluated intelligence."

"Efraim [Bamaca] was not killed

during a firefight with Army troops, but was captured, interrogated and killed," the DIA document states. It was transmitted at the time to the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, the DIA's headquarters in Washington and the State Department.

The CIA first told the White House in January 1995 about what it referred to as "new information" indicating Bamaca was captured and killed by Guatemalan military forces.

After learning of this information in March, Harbury and some U.S. lawmakers charged that the agency had deliberately held up its report in an attempt to hide the fact that a Guatemalan military officer on its payroll was involved in the slaying.

John M. Deutch, who became CIA director last month, has said that any detailed comment about the issue must await completion of a study by the CIA's inspector general. But he said yesterday that he was highly concerned about apparent shortcomings in "the timeliness and completeness of [intelligence] reporting" in Guatemala, from the field to CIA headquarters and from CIA headquarters to Capitol Hill.

Deutch said he believes the review will find "some justification" for an April allegation by Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Maine) that the CIA had deliberately misled Congress in describing what it knew about the circumstances surrounding the death of another U.S. citizen in Guatemala, William DeVine. That death also has been linked to the military officer on the CIA's payroll.